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RUEHGP/AMEMBASSY SINGAPORE 0045
RUEHKO/AMEMBASSY TOKYO 0120
RUEHWL/AMEMBASSY WELLINGTON 1395
RUEHNZ/AMCONSUL AUCKLAND 0405
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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 SUVA 000177

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SUBJECT: FIJI UPDATE 3/22/07: CORRUPTION COMPARISONS; A
PEOPLES' CHARTER; UPDATE ON "LOOK NORTH" RESULTS

REF: SUVA 170

Classified By: Amb. Dinger. Sec. 1.4 (B,D)

Summary

1. (C) A Transparency International poll taken in Fiji before the coup indicates people were not shocked by corruption in the Qarase era. Overall, Fiji stacked up quite favorably compared to global and regional results, which suggests, no surprise, that the need for a "clean up" was not really what drove the coup. More evidence indicates the interim government does not do well at coordinating policy, witness confusion over a judicial salary cut. The interim government proposes what would appear to be a lengthy process to develop a "Peoples' Charter" for the future, a vision that will need donor assistance. We sketch the state of play in the interim government's effort to "look north" to China, India, Indonesia, Malaysia, Japan, Korea, and Singapore. In short, it appears not much has happened yet, in part because some of the interlocutors have been reluctant to engage in business as usual. We would value feedback from capitals. Interim government discussions with the EU are now to take place April 18 in Brussels. End summary.

Fiji corruption: maybe not so bad

2. (U) Commodore Bainimarama has alleged that wholesale, horrible corruption in the Qarase Government necessitated a "clean up" campaign (i.e., a coup). This week, an anti-corruption workshop sponsored by Transparency International unveiled the results of a scientific poll taken in Fiji last August, one of a global set of polls amalgamated into the Global Corruption Barometer 2006 Report. The Fiji format was face-to-face interviews with 1024 adults in major urban areas in the pre-coup environment. Interestingly, the comparative results show Fiji consistently scoring better than the regional and global averages. People figured that certainly corruption was present, but when asked if they had ever paid a bribe, only 3% said they had. In general, Fiji was in excellent company. Media were present at the TI event, but so far nothing has hit the presses.

Confusion at the top

3. (SBU) Bainimarama held a media conference on March 19,

reading from a script. Included in a plea for civil servants not to strike over a 5% salary cut was mention that the cut applies to most everyone, even judges. March 20, Acting Chief Justice Gates brought to the attention of interim Attorney General Sayed-Khaiyum a constitutional provision that clearly forbids any lowering of judicial salaries during a judge's term. March 21, Sayed-Khaiyum, in effect, said: "oops." Judges' salaries will not be automatically cut, though Sayed-Khaiyum noted those judges who wish to join in the nation's sacrifice may voluntarily do so. (Comment: The clearance process for Bainimarama speeches needs work, and/or the interim AG needs to become much more familiar with the Constitution.)

A Peoples' Charter

14. (U) The Fiji presentation at the Forum Ministerial in Vanuatu last week included in the fine print a plan for a series of national consultations leading to a Peoples' Charter to set out what needs to be done during the "clean up" campaign, including realistic timelines for implementation. This is to be a more comprehensive vision than the three-plus year road map to elections Bainimarama announced in February, and the aim is "to lay the foundations for democracy, good governance, accountability, growth, unity, and prosperity in Fiji. Apparently wrapped into the process will be a "Way Forward Reform Agenda" (WFRA) for which the interim government will seek international donor contributions. (Comment: this sounds like a process that could take a while.)

Fiji's "look north" -- some feedback

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15. (C) With sanctions from Australia, New Zealand, the U.S., and other Western nations cramping the interim government's style, Bainimarama announced several weeks ago a "look north" policy. The interim government would seek friendship and assistance from China, India, Indonesia, Malaysia, and presumably Japan and Korea. Interim Foreign Minister Nailatikau would lead "trade delegations" to the first-named four. We have since learned Singapore is also on his list. We are following up with Suva embassies to gauge results so far.

-- China: We saw in the media that Nailatikau was to visit Beijing this week. He reportedly is actually in Vanuatu for the Melanesian Spearhead Group signing ceremony this Friday. The PRC DCM in Suva said there have been no recent discussions of a Nailatikau visit. When the Chinese Embassy tried to clarify the media reports with Fiji MFA, they "couldn't find anyone to talk to." Everyone seemed totally wrapped up in last week's Vanuatu Ministerial and/or preparations for EU negotiations re sugar reform aid. The Chinese did have a meeting with interim Finance Minister Chaudhry, but his only request was for an update on the various projects proposed when Premier Wen visited last April. China had no news to provide Chaudhry, in part because, again, the interim MFA has not been available to interact.

-- India: Per previous reporting from Suva and New Delhi, Nailatikau had a friendly visit to India earlier this month that reportedly is to result in some additional interactions. The F\$80 million sugar-industry assistance loan negotiated under Qarase is going forward.

-- Indonesia: Jakarta stalled a Nailatikau request to visit in mid-March by suggesting the timing was "not convenient." The actual reason was reluctance to interact with the interim government. The Indonesian Ambassador in Suva has read the Vanuatu PIF Ministerial outcome as indicating interactions are now OK. We noted that actually the interim government has yet to commit to anything concrete, so possible offers of assistance from the Forum await further developments.

Indonesia has had very modest assistance projects in Fiji and no mil/mil assistance since 2000. To date, the interim government has not asked for anything specific. Trade is tiny and in Indonesia's favor.

-- Malaysia: Fiji's previous post-coup governments in 1987 and 2000 sought and received some assistance from Malaysia. Nailatikau is seeking meetings in KL, and the Malaysian Foreign Minister is willing to engage but no dates have been agreed. The Malaysian High Commissioner noted that most all their past development-assistance efforts to Fiji failed, so she is skeptical of offering more. Some Malaysian logging interests, already deeply into the Solomons and PNG, have made "very limited" offers to harvest in Fiji, but they seem not at all concerned whether a deal is struck. More generally, Malaysian businesses are not perceiving post-coup Fiji as an attractive prospect. Malaysia has long provided military training slots to the RFMF, around 20-24 per year. Post-coup, KL offered only 13 slots for 2007. When the RFMF expressed surprise, KL offered no explanation, but none was really needed.

-- Japan: At least two interim government ministers have sought to travel to Tokyo and were surprised to learn of Japan's visa sanctions. One was Tourism Minister Rounds-Ganilau. Nailatikau may well have been the other. The Japanese Ambassador in Suva is engaging with the interim government, including with Bainimarama's PermSec, and has lobbied in particular for removal of the emergency regulations. Japan is also interested in finding ways to assist the return of Fiji's judicial system to legitimacy. We were told the interim government has not yet asked Japan for any specific assistance of any sort.

-- Korea: While Seoul has not imposed sanctions, Korea does have several post-coup policies in place: 1) no recognition of the interim government; 2) continue modest amounts of humanitarian assistance (volunteers, medical aid); 3) no

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response as yet to "look north" inquiries. The Korean Ambassador in Suva is not meeting with ministers, though interactions continue at lower levels. Korea is prepared to consider sanctions "if the situation worsens." PM Qarase had been invited to visit Seoul in January (brrr); the invitation has not been extended to Bainimarama. The Korean Ambassador suggested to us that nobody has asked Seoul to impose visa sanctions on RFMF and interim government leaders. Korean Airlines Nadi-Seoul three-times-a-week service offers the only relatively convenient way for Fiji leaders under visa sanctions to reach the world beyond the Pacific, and the Ambassador acknowledged interim government officials have increased the load factors.

-- Singapore: As there is no Singapore Embassy in Suva, we would value insights from elsewhere about any interim government contacts with Singapore.

-- Note re the EU: It now appears the EU-interim government discussion under Cotonou Agreement auspices to determine the fate of some US\$200 million in assistance, mostly for sugar reforms, will take place April 18 in Brussels.

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